

DIPLOMATIC TED SEES 'STINKER'

Wycombe Wanderers 1, Maidstone United 0

MOST charitable comment on this pathetic Isthmian League game came from Ashford Town manager Ted Ballard, visiting Loakes Park to spy out the land for tomorrow's big cup-tie. Hiding his delight behind a diplomatic mask, tactful Ted told me: "Wycombe had a bad game today but we won't under-estimate them."

Certainly, writes Argus, if Wanderers reach these pitful depths tomorrow they will be slaughtered — and rightly so — to make a Kentish holiday.

A penalty goal by John Beck five minutes from time defeated the gallant, supremely-unlucky "nine and a half" men of Maidstone. With goalkeeper Danny Wiltshire lying on a stretcher with a suspected cracked rib and right-back George Craddock hobbling with a pulled muscle Maidstone had looked like holding out against a nebulous, non-existent Wycombe attack.

It was appropriate that a defender should decide the points for none of the Wycombe forwards looked capable of the feat. Only 20-years-old inside-left Tony Horseman, making his first senior team appearance at Loakes Park, was consistently neat and accurate.

Although he tended to fade in the second half his ball distribution was a source of delight to Wycombe fans in glittering contrast to the sloppy slipshod soccer which was being played around him.

Watched by an England international representative, Len Worley chose to have his worst game of the season, running into the amber shirts as if pulled by some invisible strings. The confusion enveloped little Georgie Blair, a shadow of the confident ball juggler of a few weeks ago while Steve Hyde, on the left-wing, was hauled down into the general level of mediocrity.

MAN OF THE MATCH

I felt particularly sorry for Peter James. He was in direct opposition to 18-years-old Graham Gaston a gangling icicle of a centre-half who Arsenal are fortunate to have signed on amateur forms. The giraffe-neck of young Gaston had an irresistible attraction for the ball. His magnificent anticipation saved Maidstone on countless occasions and he was clearly the man of the match.

The Wycombe defence had a quiet, efficient game against a permutated four-man Maidstone attack which had a hopeless task. Wycombe goalkeeper Ken Brown looked immaculate at the end of an inactive game.

It was doubly tragic for Wycombe that centre-half John Fisher should collapse with a re-occurrence of groin trouble near the end.

After Fisher's injury Maidstone, who had defended desperately for most of the game, went close to scoring on several occasions and Wycombe fans were genuinely relieved when Horseman was tripped in the area. Brave Terry Luckhurst, Maidstone's substitute goalkeeper, had no chance with Beck's winning spot-kick.